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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. Introduction

1. "...in order to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, employment and decent work need to be at the centre of economic and social policies"[1]. The statement by ECOSOC rightly suggests that employment cuts through an array of social issues such as human rights, discrimination and poverty.

2. The 2007 review by the Commission for Social Development noted that unemployment stood at nearly 200 million worldwide. The forecast growth of almost 5% will do little to positively alter the 2006 statistics in 2007. This is serious as high economic growth cannot be sustained on a long-term basis with the current rate of unemployment[2].

3. Jobless growth is increasing and conditions of work for the employed leave much to be desired. Youth unemployment is worrying, more so for young women. Although child labour is on a slight decline, one in seven of the world's children are still involved in child labour. Women are continually subject to inequality in employment. Migrant workers face exploitation and other human rights violations within the workplace. HIV/AIDS compounds the situation further.

2. Employment Policies - increase employment, improve job security and provide proper remuneration.

1. Most people living in poverty are NOT unemployed but work in low-income jobs that prevent them from enjoying a basic standard of living. Employers and Governments are contributing to the cycle of poverty through negative employment policies. Positive policies ensure the rights of workers, a minimum wage and a working environment that is safe and free from discrimination against any class, creed or social group. These policy guidelines go back to the Employment Policy Convention of 1964.[3] These guidelines can reduce retrenchment during economic slowdown, assist the unemployed in finding work, provide job support, encourage later retirement, enhance productivity and provide job security[4].

2. Winning policy formulas include active labour market policies, social security and strict wage policies. Spain, Denmark and Austria increased employment and improved their economies through fiscal policy, tax reviews and regional-enabling policies. The Spanish employment strategy focused on vocational and occupational

[1] http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/2006/hls2006/index.shtml
[2] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/getb07en.pdf
[3] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/hrdr/instr/c_122.htm
[4] http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/25/59/39251262.pdf

training and employment stability[5]. The Republic of Korea's Employment Insurance System ensured that laid- off workers received unemployment benefits and quicker rehiring. This system, covering 4/5 of workers by 2002, helped the Republic of Korea not only reduce unemployment but also maintain security for employed people[6].

3. General microeconomic or macroeconomic policy helps achieve decent employment for all. Certain affected groups require more than general policies. General policies are insufficient for women, migrant workers, people with disabilities, older people or youth, who all suffer discrimination.

3. Youth

1. Employable young people make up half the world's unemployed; an alarming situation that needs to be addressed if economies are to be sustained. A vast majority of youth cannot read or write whilst others, though well educated, lack employable skills[7]. Recommendations from the World Programme of Action for Youth apply now - including making education a priority and reducing discrimination based on gender, religion, age or ethnicity. Developing countries need to be concerned with 'brain drain' by ensuring that educated youth are not lured to developed nations offering higher paying jobs. The provision of grants and support for self-employment and job creation in technical fields as well as programmes to help vulnerable groups of youth seeking employment are necessary[8].

2. The youth market could spur economies and contribute to development of nations. Most developing countries have a short window of opportunity to get this right before their record numbers of youth become middle-aged, and they lose their demographic dividend. This isn't just enlightened social policy. This may be one of the most profound decisions a developing country will ever make to banish poverty and galvanize its economy.[9]

4. Women

1. The Global Employment Trends for Women show progress in the area of employment. More women are participating in paid work. Many however are in informal work thus not affording them adequate remuneration or security[10].

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[5] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/esp4.pdf

[6] Ibid.

[7] http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:21049364~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html

[8] http://www.un.org/events/youth98/backinfo/ywpa2000.htm#Priority%202:

[9] http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:21049364~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html

[10] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/getw07.pdf

2. Many women are still unemployed; their numbers stand at 6.6 percent[11]. For those in gainful employment, a worrying wage gap still exists despite many women being educated and fully qualified, sometimes even more so than their male counterparts[12]. The problem is not exclusive to developing nations – the gender wage gap still remains at 15% in all sectors in EU member States.[13]

3. UNIFEM rightly proposes that labour market analysts and economists take into account the contribution of women in informal work. It also suggested the use of an informal economy budget analysis to assess possible biases in the allocation of Government resources[14]. Familial demands on women contribute to gender inequality. Governments need to address this with better policies responding to the challenges of balancing familial and caregiver obligations including providing day-care centres and paid maternity and paternity leave.

5. People with disabilities

1. People with disabilities are nearing 10% of the world's population. They are no longer a minority that can be ignored. There are almost 400 million adults with mental or physical disabilities and of those up to 80% are unemployed in developing countries.[15] People with disabilities need job training as much as their able-bodied peers. Their contribution to productivity, efficiency and ultimately to the economy is not in dispute[16].

6. Migrant Workers

1. Migrants do not usually face issues of unemployment but rather of decent employment. Integration to enable migrants to contribute to the economy and productivity of the host nation in return for assimilation is a fitting strategy[17]. In many nations even basic social protection for migrant workers is denied. Minimum labour and workplace standards have been reported to be effective in many countries, even for undocumented or illegal migrants[18].

2. The decent work problem can be improved through Government policy, subsequent to the ratification of the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, in particular, the recommendation that trade unions provide training, orientation integration/reintegration and other

[11] Ibid.
[12] http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/pub/IPCOnePager20.pdf (June 2006)
[13] European Commission, "On Equality between Women and Men", Brussels, 2005. (as quoted in; http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/getw07.pdf)
[14] http://www.un-ngls.org/women-2005.pdf
[15] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/disability/download/codeeng.pdf
[16] http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang--en/WCMS_082586/index.htm
[17] http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/events/2005/demographic_change/papademetriou_txt_en.pdf
[18] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/projects/asia.htm

services a migrant worker may access to mitigate against trafficking and other migrant abuse[19].

7. Children

1. The number of children in the worst forms of labour fell by 11% but there was an increase of 15.6 million in other sectors[20]. Child labour has not decreased. It has just changed. Child labour is often sidelined by economic and financial policy because there is no obvious link between the abolition of child labour and economic gain.

2. The policies must involve all stakeholders. There needs to be active and thorough research on child labour in every country. Research needs to be linked to awareness-raising activities, close cooperation between NGOs and Government in eradication efforts, national plans of action that consolidate efforts which ensure policies are backed by adequate powers of enforcement.

3. Besides trafficking and forced labour by employers, some children are forced to work because their parents are unable to carry the burden for reasons including disability, hiring discrimination and unfair wages. Child labour may be reduced further with proper employment policies aimed at other social groups that may not seem interlinked to child rights.

8. HIV/AIDS

1. More than 40 million people are suffering from this disease worldwide. Ninety-five per cent of them are in developing countries and about a third are working-age youth. There is a need for active employment policies. The economy of a country with a high number of HIV/AIDS sufferers loses with discriminatory employment. Workplace employment policies to protect workers with HIV/AIDS and control the spread of the disease have worked and should be replicated everywhere[21]. Governments must take the lead in formulating a set of universal policy guidelines that companies and organisations include in their company policies as well as optional policies that are workable depending on the nature of the company, business and socio-political climate of a country.

9. Older people

1. Currently almost 700 million people are over 60. By 2050 there will be about 2 billion people over 60. Eighty per cent of older people will live in the developing world. One way to help address the issue is through employment and social

[19] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/genact/socprot/migrant/migrant1.htm
[20] http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223775&Language=EN
[21] http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/oldwww/infsources/hiv_aids/WorkplacePolicy.pdf

protection.[22] Social protection involves provision of health care and income security. Whilst pension schemes can provide social protection, the growing number of people who will become pensioners in the near future will be more than most economies can sustain, hence the need to incorporate older people into the workforce to continue their contribution to the economy. This would also be helpful to older people who will not be eligible for pensions and do not have the luxury of retiring early.

2. Older women are less likely to have literacy or numeracy skills, still less likely to qualify for a pension and are most likely to end up working to support themselves and dependants.[23] Gender stereotypes do women no favours, e.g., believing that women even as young as 35 are too old to work due to familial commitments and disinterest in career promotion. These women are effectively 'culled' from the workforce on this assumption for which there is no evidence.[24]

10. Conclusion

1. There cannot be change within the employment sphere without total commitment to national policies designed to eradicate poverty, increase the economic participation of all people and ensure decent work.

2. Global commitments already exist. UN Programmes and plans of action targeted at specific social groups are a good base and guide. The World Programme of Action for Youth looks at many ways a State can increase youth participation in the economy as well as ensuring proper wage and working conditions. The Programme also provides a 10-step, simple guide[25] to bringing about a policy overhaul. The guide states that participation from all groups from the outset is key, with a tabled budget and needs analysis conducted and utilized to frame policy.

3. In a similar vein, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons approaches disability from a human rights perspective. An implementation guide is readily available. The Programme brief[26] outlines areas for change such as the inclusion of disabled people in decision-making, prevention of disability, equal opportunities as well as training for acquiring employable skills.

4. The United Nations Family Programme covers all policies that relate to matters of the family including family members living with HIV/AIDS, parental roles, intra-familial well-being, and family policy development.[27] This could well include support

[22] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/older/download/engage.pdf
[23] Ibid.
[24] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/older/download/olderwomen.pdf
[25] http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/nationalpolicy.htm
[26] http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=23
[27] http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/TenthAnv/UN%20Family%20Programme.PDF

for women in informal work in the household and working mothers facing occupational discrimination based on their familial obligations.

5. The Madrid Plan of Action for the Ageing deals with continued employment through old age and income support to ensure older people maintain a decent standard of living.

It would seem that most UN programmes and plans seek a similar goal; the attainment of basic human rights and dignity. They also agree tha. to achieve this the State needs to revamp national policies. Governments should plan their programmes of action to include poverty, unemployment and decent work initiatives, tailor-made for the demographic make-up and socio-political situation of their respective countries.

It is only through empowerment, employment and social protection that poverty can be eradicated and human rights upheld.